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## A SONG FROM THE NEGEB

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In the summer of 1882 occurred the rebellion of 'Arabi, the Egyptian, against the British. On the eve of this uprising, the famous oriental scholar, Edward Henry Palmer, known far and wide among the peoples of Egypt and Sinai as Sheikh Abdullah or Abdullah Effendi, was given the task of winning over to Great Britain the Arab tribes of Sinai. He made two expeditions. On the first, which lasted from July 15 to July 31, he made his way without escort from Gaza through the desert to Suez, a remarkable exploit. His negotiations on this trip were highly successful, for he seems to have won over the Bedu of the whole region to the British. He was now appointed interpreter-in-chief to the forces in Egypt, and with hardly any rest from his previous trip, was again sent into the desert, this time starting from Suez. He was accompanied by Captain W. J. Gill and Flag-Lieutenant Harold Charrington, the objects being to procure camels and to gain the friendship of the sheikhs by presents of money. On the eleventh of August he and his companions were betrayed and murdered in Wadi Sudr. Accounts differ as to the manner of their death, and very few travelers have since heard of them from the mouths of the Arabs of that region. It may not, then, be uninteresting to give, in the dialect of the Negeb, an Arab song containing a brief reference to this famous scholar, who, when only forty-two years of age, gave his life and career for Britain.

During the spring and early summer of 1905, the Director and members of the American School in Jerusalem made a study of the Negeb and surrounding regions.<sup>1</sup> The director for the year was Professor Nathaniel Schmidt, of Cornell University; the students were Messrs. Olmstead and Wrench and the author.

<sup>1</sup> The main results of this work have been recorded in two articles by Professor Schmidt: "Kadesh Barnea," *JBL*, XXIX (1910), 61-76, and "The 'Jérahmeel' Theory and the Historic Importance of the Negeb," *Hibbert Journal*, VI (1908), 322-42.

Journeying south from Beersheba, we finally camped, on the evening of May 26, at the edge of the plateau which overlooks 'Ain Gadís and the remarkable sweep of desert to the south. Early on the following morning our camel-drivers and muleteers descended to the springs to water the animals, and, on returning, declared that the Arabs were gathering at the springs to prevent us from coming down. The muleteers had mentioned the fact that we were accompanied by a Turkish soldier, whereupon, according to their report, the Arabs had cursed the government. Our *zaptié*, Mustafa, then informed us that two of his fellows from Bír el-Seba<sup>c</sup> had been killed here, some time previously, while attempting to collect taxes, the government later imprisoning five of those supposed to have been ringleaders in the murder. Something very evidently had to be done immediately, and Mustafa accordingly left his rifle at the tent and descended to parley with the Arabs. He soon returned with a friend of his, an old but lithe and agile man named Fréj ibn 'Íd Sâlih (فريج بن عيد صالح), and reported that the matter was settled. We were well content to hear the terms, for during his absence we had seen armed Arabs coming from various parts toward the springs. The people first gave as their objection to our visit the statement that they feared we might cast a magic spell on the water. The real reason, however, soon appeared. We had on the previous day engaged a guide and informant at a well in Wadi Háfir, a man of the 'Azâzime tribe. The Bedu of the Gadís region are a branch of the Tiyâha, called the Berekât, and they declared it was not right for a man of another tribe to guide us through their territory. The 'Azâzime guide accordingly left us after asking one of our party to swear by his greatest prophet not to bewitch him on his homeward way.<sup>1</sup> During the remainder of our sojourn in the lands

<sup>1</sup> The Arabs of the whole region are very superstitious. It was impossible for the author to purchase an old stone pipe from one of the 'Azâzime without first swearing that he would not use it as a means for holding a spell over the poor fellow. The pipe was, naturally, as much a part of him as the clothes he wore day and night; and, as every Bedawi knows, an enemy needs only the possession of a stray rag of a man's clothing to work him woe. Another member of the party was presented with a young owl near the ruins of Sa'adi and, despite the protests and dire predictions of the camel-drivers, insisted on carrying it along. Two days later, at Beersheba, the drivers demanded their pay, refusing to make the further trip to Jerusalem by way of 'Ain Jidi. From this time on, "*kúllo min el-bâmi*," "it's all because of the owl," became a by-word among the remaining members of the outfit.

of the Tiyâha, Frêj acted as our guide; and a more intelligent man could hardly have been found for the purpose.

While sitting in the shade of the tent shortly after engaging Frêj, we produced the phonograph and, after giving the Arabs a few selections, asked whether one of them could not give us a story or a song for our collection. Frêj volunteered, though he hesitated to sing without his *rubâbe*, a one-stringed violin, the favorite musical instrument of the region. We noticed that one line of his song mentioned a *gunsul kebîr* and, when he had concluded, inquired who this "great consul" was. The Arabs sitting about answered, almost in a voice, "Shêkh 'Abdullâh," the name by which Palmer was so well known. Our visitors of the Tiyâha apparently had a great contempt for the murderer of the "great consul." According to them, Muñair, the father of the Arab mentioned in the song, killed Palmer for the money he was carrying and not because of his political errand. No mention was made of Palmer's companions.

Two transcriptions of the song have been given. The first follows the unscientific method of combining English consonants, in their most common values, with Italian vowels, and helping out with diacritical marks. The other is the system of the Association phonétique internationale. In the former the values of sounds foreign to English are represented as follows:

h =	ح
kh =	خ
s =	ص
d =	ض
t =	ط
c (the reversed apostrophe) =	ع
gh =	غ
g represents a sonant corresponding to	ق
> (the apostrophe) represents elision	

The glottal stop (*hamza*) has not been represented in the transliteration, since it does not appear in the song as a significant sound.

Unstressed *a*, *e*, and *u* have at times the value of *a* in "private" or *e* in "the," when uttered in unaffected conversation or reading.

Vowels with circumflex are stressed and long in quantity.

First transcription:<sup>1</sup>

- 1 Ya rākib min fōg ghōj  
T̄imirr el-baṭn min kuṭhr el-khaḍīr;
- 3 Ya rākib min fōg ghōj  
Mitl es-sagr yōman yetīr;
- 5 Ya rākib ʿala ʔt-ṭarīg el-kuzzi,  
Yilfi ilbak ʿala bēt el-fagīr.
- 7 Sellim ʿalē bi selām u būse,  
Sellim ʿalē min jūw ed-ḍamīr.
- 9 Aḥad Allā ma bēnī u bēnak,  
Aḥad Allā el-yōm el-kebīr.
- 11 Ibn Muṭair y<sup>h</sup>hāwid ʿan jenābo;  
Abū gablu ḍabaʿ gunṣul kebīr.
- 13 In kán ma yufārig jenābo,  
Rudd rai l'Ibn ʿAmr el-kebīr;
- 15 Wa thānī rai l'Ibn ʿAmr Sālim,  
Yaʿrif el-ḥerī, rájil shawīr.
- 17 Wa thālith rai l'akbar et-Tiyāha,  
Abu ʿAbdūn maʿ ḥarba ṭarīra,  
Yehūt el-bāl ʿala ʔsh-shēkh esh-shahīr.
- 20 Abu Rḡayyig fāris u kāmīl,  
Yefúkh el-khél bi ʔs-séf et-ṭarīr.
- 22 Ibn ʿAṭiyye gadūs el-meshāyekh,  
ʿAdu ʔr-rāwi li ʔt-ṭarsh el-ketīr.
- 24 Wa ʔl-Kh<sup>z</sup>ēyil hū shēkh el-meshāyekh,  
ʿInd et-tanīb hū ḥākī gaṣīr.
- 26 Amma Tallāb, maʿu séfu muṣayyagh;  
Yehūsh el-khél buṭākhi ʔl-ketīr.
- 28 Amma Jebr, hū eḥmāt el-fuwēris,  
Baḥr ṭāmi tismaʿ lu hadīr.
- 30 Abu Shunnār hū ʔstumm el-fuwēris,  
Yukhtub el-khél ʿala ʔj-jemʿ al-ketīr.

<sup>1</sup> As the footnotes on the text deal largely with phonetics, they have been given in connection with the second transcription.

- 32 Ibn Tallâg negyi ʔl-fuwêris;  
Maʕu jûhar ya wuzn kethîr.
- 34 Abu Rabʕa hû ehmât el-fuwêris;  
ʕInd el-ḥukûm ḥakyu tagîl.

Second transcription:

- 1 ja 'ra:kib min fo:G ʔo:dʒ  
ʕəmîrr<sup>1</sup> əl baʔn min kuθr əl xa'di:r
- 3 ja 'ra:kib min fo:G ʔo:dʒ  
mitl əsagr<sup>2</sup> 'jo:mən jə'ti:r
- 5 ja 'ra:kib qala ʔa'ri:G əl 'kazzi<sup>3</sup>  
'jilfi ilbak<sup>4</sup> qala<sup>5</sup> be:t əl fa'gi:r
- 7 'sellim qa'le: bi sə'la:m u<sup>6</sup> 'bu:se  
'sellim qa'le: min dʒu:w əða'mi:r
- 9 'aḥad al'la: ma 'be:ni u 'be:nak  
'aḥad al'la: əl jo:m əl ke'bi:r<sup>7</sup>
- 11 ibm<sup>8</sup> mu'ʔair jə'na:wid qan dʒə'na:bo<sup>3</sup>  
a'bu: 'gablu 'ḡabaq 'guntəl ke'bi:r

<sup>1</sup> It has not seemed necessary to distinguish two forms of *r* in the present article. The *r* in *ʕəmîrr* had a slightly accentuated trill; hence the doubling.

<sup>2</sup> Note that the letter *s* is not here represented as doubled. The "intensification" marked by *teshdid* is not consistently carried out in the pronunciation of modern Arabic, especially in cases of the assimilated *l* of the definite article. When actually reproduced, the sound is the equivalent of the "doubling" heard in such words as Italian *fatto*. Throughout the present transcription, only actual occurrences of such "doubling" in the guide's pronunciation have been recorded.

<sup>3</sup> The *h* so commonly employed in transcribing the feminine ending *-ah* (*-eh*), the personal ending *-uh* (*-oh*), and the final syllable of the word *Allāh* has not been used in the present transcriptions, since it is not pronounced. The *h* is, of course, heard in the exclamatory *Allāh!* and in other words whose final radical is *h* as well as in a few exclamations like *a:h* and *o:h* (the latter with lax *o*), but a final *h* sound is comparatively infrequent.

<sup>4</sup> Note the transposition of *l* and *b*. This phenomenon is not uncommon in Arabic.

<sup>5</sup> The use of *على* for *الى* with the verb *لفى* follows a general tendency, in Syrian Arabic, toward the use of the preposition *على* with verbs of *going*, *coming*, and *arriving*, such as *راج*, *اتي*, and *وصل*.

<sup>6</sup> The conjunction *wa* (*wə*) often becomes *u*, especially when followed by a labial, as is likewise frequently the case in the vernacular of Palestine and Syria. This *u* has about the quality of English *u*: but is short in quantity.

<sup>7</sup> Observe the poverty of vocabulary and lack of poetic consciousness as instanced by the word *ke'bi:r* used at the end of three consecutive couplets; and, later, the repetition of *ʕari:r* and *ke'ti:r*.

<sup>8</sup> *ibm muʔair*, a case of assimilation both progressive and regressive, though perhaps predominantly regressive, since the *n* of *ibn*, as a rule, rather tends to assert itself.

- 13 in ka:n ma jə'fa:rig dʒə'na:bo  
 ʔrudd ʔrai libn qamr əl kə'bi:r
- 15 wə 'θa:ni rai libn qamr 'sa:lim  
 'jaqrif əl ɛəri 'ra:dʒl fə'wi:r<sup>1</sup>
- 17 wə 'θa:liθ rai 'lakbar əti'ja:ha  
 'abu qab'du:n maq 'ɛarba t̤a'ri:ra  
 jəHu:t̤ əl ba:l qala fe:x əfa'hi:r
- 20 'abur'gajig 'fa:ris u 'ka:mil  
 jə'fux<sup>2</sup> əl xe:l bis'se:f ət̤a'ri:r
- 22 ibn qa'tijje ga'du:s əl mə'fa:jəx  
 'qadur'rə:wi<sup>3</sup> lit̤'tarf əl kə'ti:r
- 24 wəl-x<sup>4</sup>ze:jil hu<sup>4</sup> fe:x əl mə'fa:jəx  
 qund<sup>5</sup> ət̤ə'ni:b hu 'ɛa:ki Gə'si:r
- 26 'amma t̤al'la:b 'maqu 'se:fə<sup>6</sup> mə'sajjaɛ  
 jə'hu:f əl xe:l bu't̤a:xil-kə'ti:r<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> fəwi:r, a <sup>9</sup>فَعِيل form from *med.* و شار on the analogy of طويل and the like. Either a provincialism or a case of poetic license.

<sup>2</sup> jə'fux for literary يَأْفُخ. The *u* in this case had the value of the vowel in the English word *took* (*tuk*). The change from *i* to *u* was doubtless due chiefly to the influence of the long, stressed *u*: in the noun يَأْفُوح, which is more common than the verb.

This same influence may have aided in determining the stress, which in the dialects to the north would in this case fall on the first syllable. However, we must here reckon also with a peculiarity of Negeb Arabic which constantly drew our attention. The Bedu of this region seem to have little regard for fixed stress, particularly in words containing only short vowels. For example, the name of a certain mountain pass,

ذَنْب الْعَيْرِ, was called indifferently Dhfnib el-ʕAir (*'ðinib əl-Qair*), Dhfnib el-ʕAir (*ði'nib əl-Qair*), Idhnfb el-ʕAir (*ið'nib əl-Qair*) and Ídhnib el-ʕAir (*ið'nib əl-Qair*). The same held true, though less frequently, in words with long vowels, as in the name عِنْقَاء, Enəgā (*Qene:Ga:*), which was sometimes stressed on the last syllable, the final vowel being in that case followed by the glottal stop (*hamza*), and sometimes on the second syllable without final *hamza*. This disregard of fixed stress occurred not only in proper names and isolated phrases, but in ordinary discourse.

<sup>3</sup> rə:wi. The *ɔ:*, though long, is not the tense *ɔ:* of English *awl* (*ɔ:l*), but the lax form of the vowel, as in *hot* (*hɔt*). The rounding is due to the influence of the labial.

<sup>4</sup> The short *u* in *hu* has about the quality of *u*: in English *boot* (*bu:t*).

<sup>5</sup> This seems the closest possible approximation to the usual pronunciation of the word عِنْد. The tongue position is that assumed in producing tense *u*, while the lip position is slightly closer than for the production of *a*.

<sup>6</sup> This was doubtless one of the cases where Frēj used the nunation in singing, omitting it later when repeating the poem to the author. The words as heard in the song might then be transcribed *se:fə mə'sajjaɛ̄*, though in the case of *se:fə* the nasal was more probably assimilated to the following *m*, since no nunation was noticed except in the closing syllable of a line.

<sup>7</sup> When pronounced distinctly كَثِير and كَبِير always have *ε* rather than *ə* as the vowel of the first syllable.

- 28 'amma dʒɛbr hu əH'ma:t<sup>1</sup> əl fu'we:ris  
baHr 'tami tis'maQ lu ha'di:r
- 30 'abu fun'na:r hu sʔum əl fu'we:ris  
'juxtub<sup>2</sup> əl xe:l 'qala 'dʒemQ al ke'ti:r
- 32 ibn ʔal'la:g 'neGjil<sup>3</sup>-fu'we:ris  
'maqu 'dʒu:har ja wuzn ke'ti:r
- 34 'abu rə'bi:qa hu əH'ma:t əl fu'we:ris  
qumd əl hu'kam<sup>4</sup> 'ħakju<sup>5</sup> tə'gi:l

The Arabic:

- 1 يا ركب من فوق غوج
- طمر البطن من كثر الخصي
- 3 يا ركب من فوق غوج
- مثل السقر يومًا يطير
- 5 يا ركب على الطريف الكفة
- يلقى ابلك على بيت الفقير
- 7 سلم عليه بسلام وبوسة
- سلم عليه من جو الضير
- 9 احد الله ما بيني وبينك
- احد الله اليوم الكبير

<sup>1</sup> *Hma:t*, i.e., حماة with prosthetic *alif*. A فَعَلَّة form from حمى on the analogy of infinitives like شَكَاة. The word is not found in literary Arabic.

<sup>2</sup> *juxtub* for *jaxdub*; *d* becomes *t* through progressive assimilation. The change from *a* to *u* is perhaps due in part to the elevation of the back of the tongue in forming *x*. However, it would be vain to attempt to explain, on purely phonetic grounds, all such variations in the vowel of the imperfect.

<sup>3</sup> Note the transposition of *i*.

<sup>4</sup> Outside of the Negeb the author has not heard a distinct  $\Lambda$  vowel (like Eng. *u* in *cup*) among Arabic-speaking peoples. In the case of *Hu'kam* (which was almost *Hə'kam*) we have, as a result of the shifting of the stress, the expansion of syllabic *m* into a vocalic syllable. The same  $\Lambda$  sound appears in the fifth line of the song (*kΛssi*) and was also heard in the topographical name *Jebel Yelūg* (ʒ'laG), where again we note a shifting of the stress.

<sup>5</sup> This form of infinitive from حكي, though not classically recognized, is sufficiently common in modern dialects of Arabic.



- ابن مطير يحاود عن جنابه 11  
 ابوه قبله ضيع قنصل كبير  
 ان كان ما يفارق جنابه 13  
 ردّ راى لابن عمرو الكبير  
 وثانى راى لابن عمرو سالم 15  
 يعرف الحرى رجل شوبير  
 وثالث راى لأكبر التياهة 17  
 ابو عبدون مع حربة طرية  
 يحوط البال على الشيخ الشهير  
 ابو رقيف فارس وكامل 20  
 يافخ الحيد بالسيف الطير  
 ابن عطية قدوس المشايخ 22  
 عدو الراوى للطرش الكثير  
 والحزائل هو شيخ المشايخ 24  
 عند التائب هو حاكى قصير  
 اما طلاب معه سيف مصبغ 26  
 يحوش الحيد بطاخي الكثير  
 اما جبر هو حماة الفوارس 28  
 بحر طام تسمع له هدير  
 ابو سنار هو اسطم الفوارس 30  
 يخذب الحيد على الجمع الكثير  
 ابن طلاق نقى الفوارس 32  
 معه جوهر يا وزن كثير  
 ابو ربيعة هو حماة الفوارس 34  
 عند الحكم حكيه ثقيل

A rather literal translation would read as follows:

- 1 Thou rider on a supple steed,<sup>1</sup>  
Ample<sup>2</sup> of paunch from abundance of fodder;
- 3 Thou rider on a supple steed,  
Like the falcon when it flies;
- 5 Thou rider on the hard road,  
May thy camel turn in at the tent of the poor.<sup>3</sup>
- 7 Greet him with a salaam and a kiss,<sup>4</sup>  
Greet him from within the heart.
- 9 There is one God as between me and thee,  
One God there is on the great day.
- 11 Ibn Muṭair keeps annoying him;<sup>5</sup>  
His father before him smote a great consul.
- 13 If he does not keep away from him,  
Consult with Ibn ‘Amr, the elder;

<sup>1</sup> The adjective غوج, from غاج, “to bend, incline,” is applied as an epithet to horses, camels, and men. It ranges in meaning from “lithe” to “swift”; hence the above translation.

<sup>2</sup> The word طبر as applied to a horse is usually rendered “fleet, active” and the like. As applied to an animal’s paunch it seems preferable to take the meaning “swollen, ample,” which the verb permits.

<sup>3</sup> Possibly the adjective is here used as a proper name, el-Faqir.

<sup>4</sup> The Persian word بوسه is widely used among Arabic-speaking peoples. In the Negeb the *selām* without the kiss is the usual *selām* ‘alēkum with the response *wa* ‘alēkum *es-selām*, both uttered, as a rule, in a very matter-of-fact manner and often in a mere undertone. Added to this, in the case of two friends who have not seen each other for several days or longer, is a weak handclasp, amounting to little more than a touching of the right palms, and a kiss which, so far as the observation of the author goes, consists merely in each person’s inclining his head just past his friend’s face and smacking his own lips. The greeting thus partakes both of the nature of a kiss and of a “falling on the neck.” No doubt the actual kiss on the left cheek is sufficiently common also. Men greet their male friends with the *bāse* and women those of their own sex, but it is only in the case of relatives that two of different sex exchange this greeting. There is, of course, no display of shyness or embarrassment in connection with such a kiss.

<sup>5</sup> I.e., “keeps annoying the poor man.” In view of the preposition عن, the author was at first inclined to translate this passage “Ibn Muṭair avoids him,” deriving this meaning from form III of the verb (حسد). However, it seems preferable, as suggested by Mr. Martin Sprengling, to retain the meaning of the corresponding form of (حود), “return upon . . . like fever” (here rendered “annoy”), which accords better with the sentiment of the following couplet. Neither (حود) nor (حيد) (form III) is in literary Arabic followed by a preposition.

- 15 And a second consultation with Ibn ʿAmr Sâlim,  
Who knows what is fitting, a man to be consulted;
- 17 And a third consultation with the greatest of the Tiyâha,<sup>1</sup>  
Abu ʿAbdûn, with the sharp lance,  
Who guards his secret against the famous shêkh.
- 20 Abu Ruqayyiq is a knight through and through,  
Who cleaves the skulls of the horsemen with his sharp sword.
- 22 Ibn ʿAtiyye is the bold one of the shêkhs,  
The enemy of the water-drawer because of his many flocks.
- 24 And el-Khazâ'il is shêkh of the shêkhs;  
When it comes to reproaching, he is a man of few words.
- 26 As for Tallâb, he has a sword of the goldsmith's art;  
He rounds up the horses, plump for the most part.
- 28 As for Jebr, he is the protection of the knights,  
A swelling sea, whose roaring thou mayest hear.
- 30 Abu Shunnâr is the noble one of the knights;  
He smites the horsemen despite their great numbers.
- 32 Ibn Tallâq is the pick of the knights,  
Wearing a Damascene blade of great weight.
- 34 Abu Rabî'a is the protection of the knights;  
In judgment his words are weighty.

Our guide's pronunciation was far from consistent. Both in singing and in conversation he used a pure back *a*: with the consonant *r*,<sup>2</sup> and practically the same sound with the so-called gutturals. With the "emphatic" consonants this *a*: had the well-known "obscured" sound caused by the peculiar position of the organs, particularly the tongue, in producing them. When adjacent to any of the other consonants, however, the *a*: inclined to become, in singing, front *a*:. In ordinary conversation the tendency was to raise the front of the tongue, producing *æ*: and *e*:.

The diphthong عِي was, in his singing, nearly a pure *e*.; though it became occasionally the diphthong *ei*. In conversation the sound varied between *ai*, *e*., and *ei*.

<sup>1</sup> In lines 17-19 we must suppose either that Frêj's memory faltered or that the author of the poem deliberately altered the scheme of his song.

<sup>2</sup> Note the exception, however, in the word فوارس (*fuwe:ris*) in several couplets (ll. 28 ff.).

The consonants **ث** and **ذ** frequently retained their original fricative sound, though as a rule they were not distinguished from **ت** and **د**.

**ط** and **ض** were rightly formed, though frequently not so sharply outlined as in other sections.

The fricative character of **غ** and **خ** was often considerably reduced and a faucal resonance given, so that they closely resembled **ع** and **ح** respectively. This is especially remarkable in that there seems no essential phonetic relation between **غ** and **ع** on the one hand and **خ** and **ح** on the other. In the mouth of any but a Semite such a weakened **غ** would have degenerated into a modern Greek gamma<sup>1</sup> or western Turkish **غ**, while the **خ** would have become the weak **خ** heard in Constantinople.

Aside from a few ordinary words like *jo:mən*, the nunation is not heard in the vernacular of the Negeb; but it occurred at the end of several lines of our song. Its character was that of a short nasal vowel with the tongue position of *a*.<sup>2</sup> The sound was so light that it did not reproduce well on the phonographic records; and, as Frèj omitted the nunation entirely when later dictating the poem to the author, it has of necessity been omitted in the above transcriptions.

The poem might be considered as a *qasīda*, taking this term in its broadest sense; though it is certainly a very degenerate form, even as compared with the average modern *qasīda*. Perhaps it would be more charitable to the composer to call it, as did the Arabs, simply an *ūghniye*, a "song." The melody was a weird, monotonous minor with a general effect quite different from most of the music heard in Palestine and Syria.

<sup>1</sup> As in the word *γάλα*.

<sup>2</sup> The nunation in *jo:mən* (l. 4) and similar words in current use is not a nasal vowel.